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PRIMITIVE HISTORY IN PRIMARY GROUPS OF THE LABORATORY SCHOOL.

II.

THE amount of time to be spent on each stage of this reconstruction of primitive society varies with the experience of the children and teacher. The step in social organization demanded by the change from the wandering hunting life to a stationary life is slight, so that it is hard to make the children realize that man's control of his methods in obtaining food through combination must have vastly improved, or that some specially favorable locality must be found to warrant the assumption of the settling down of a wandering family in a permanent abode. As with all steps in this work, the amount of time in experimentation, in actual construction work with materials, must be of necessity left to the teacher. Children of seven have been found to be very much interested in the subject of underground water, either as related to the formation of caves, or in a later period as furnishing a nomadic tribe with its supply of water on the lower, grassy plain. Some children have been found interested in the nature of the stone in which caves are found, and in the essential differences in the wearing away of a rock by water, as dependent upon the nature of the rock.

From the very beginning the main geographic features, such as in this period of forest life the location of the forest and its relation to water-supply, were of much interest to the children. They experimented with nut seedlings at various times, and cared for the seedlings which survived, unexpectedly, the vicissitudes of a Chicago schoolroom in winter. The dependence for germination of certain nuts and seeds on exposure to a freezing temperature is an illustration of the kind of problem it has been thought better from experience to reserve for a later age. Such facts as the distribution of trees as varying with altitude have been found to be material for these children *only* when in their past experience they chanced to have actually seen the condition controling such distribution; then such general points as that some seedlings could survive cold and exposure, and hence live farther north and higher up on the mountains, seemed to appeal to their intelligence. The way in which the occupation of the people depended upon the geographical area was brought out through discussions in which all their individual experiences were of necessity brought together.

The ideal outline in the teacher's mind was as follows:[1] A mountainous region with forest-covered hills stretching down to a lower level where the forests are confined to the river plains, and the low foothills and grassy prairies stretch downward to the sea. Nomadic hunting life, first beginning in the upper section of the forest, then gradually, as weapons and power of combination advance, descending to the plains and becoming transformed first into the nomadic hunting tribe, combining hunting with a semi-pastoral life; then into the semi-agricultural, as the advantages of the natural grain-producing regions are combined with a roving and hunting life after the harvests are over. This half-way organization merges both in habitat and method of life with the pastoral nomadic peoples, and again advances to the agricultural stage and security of permanent habitation in the fertile river valley. Down upon the edge of the sea is found the typical fishing village, where perchance the stress of circumstance forces the development of the trader and organizer of commerce, as typified in Phœnicia, or combined with the semi-pastoral and agricultural habit, as found in the Grecian archipelago. The main geographic ideas which the children work out in this outline are the formation of a river system, the relation of kind of vegetation to the water-supply, and the dependence of the animal life of the region upon this vegetation. Any further geographic knowledge in detail and the particular points picked out for experimentation depends entirely upon the children's local surrounding and previous experience. The statement perhaps can be made that the reproduction on a sand table by the children of the features of the country they are constructing is a safe test of their geographic notions only when they are carefully guarded against misconceptions, especially in the relation of size and distance, by the use of pictures and their own past experiences. Such simple physiographic points as the action of water in cutting away gulleys and ravines, the way in which this rock waste is deposited in the downward course of the stream, involving the formation of beds of sand, sandstone, clay beds, and slate, and the effect of the change of level on the course of the stream, can be given in such a way that they become a part of the child's general experience, as is shown by the fact that he spontaneously uses these terms in a report of what he has seen happening in the swiftly running gutter.

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[1] Acknowledgment is due Mr. Patrick Geddes for suggestions received from a lecture on Scotland as an illustration of the typical historical development of a country.

In the case of the city children with whom this work has been done, the continued interest depends largely on the personal element in the story the development of which they are following. As might be supposed, it has been found that the balance of interest sometimes lies entirely in the personality of the story, and then again swings over to interest in materials and processes carried on in the day-by-day illustration of the story. In one case the chief concern was almost continuously in the things to be done; with another class, in the dramatic and personal, and what would happen next to the particular characters in the story. This difference is probably due to a difference in the personality of the children, as approximately the same methods were used with children of similar environment. As before stated, it has also been observed that, without any apparent reason other than the individual experience of the children, a narrative read was preferred to one which they had some share in creating.

In any stage of this social reconstruction one of the children's main interests, especially in the beginning of the year, is in the life of the child of that time. This interest, though a reoccurring and ever-present one, is not as dominant as might be imagined. The doings of grown-up primitive society are well within the scope of the modern child, and give the freedom which he spontaneously enjoys when he gives himself up to his imaginings of that time when everything will be possible—when he himself is grown up.

Most typical enterprises carried on by primitive peoples are toward the doings of these grown-up people of the past finds its reflection in the interpretation by primitive people of those natural of a kind to employ the child's imagination and satisfy his dominant need of simple motives and much action. This same attitude phenomena which they could not understand.

The child's attitude toward the old nature-myths as the stories which these people told to account for mysterious happenings is of the same kind as toward the fairy-story. And while we find an interest in the stories as told, we rarely have any spontaneous invention of myths to explain natural phenomena. The child's imagination seems to select the activities of the people as its chosen field, rather than the more remote field of personification of natural forces. Unless distorted and made blasé by indiscriminative cramming of fairy-story and myth, the child's natural interests are necessarily objective at this stage.

The dramatic side of the occupational work seems, as might be supposed, much stronger in older children. This dramatic sense appears not only in the interest of the movement of the story and in acting out those events as well as they can, but also in the effort to meet the difficulties they encounter in the story. In trying the experiment of carrying this interest and dramatic expression into the form of a play in which certain events of importance to the tribe were acted out, the children showed an appreciation of two, if not more, of the general principles of the drama. The chief theme of the play was the conflict between two hunting tribes for the possession of a hunting ground. After one or two attempts, they realized that the first part or act must show the causes of the conflict which formed the climax of the play; and secondarily, instead of having the climax come at once, as at first proposed, it would make the action more interesting to have it worked up to, through smaller acts of aggression which would lead to the final conflict in the third act; while the fourth act showed, in a dramatic meeting of both tribes, the final adjustment through the submission of the aggressors. In carrying out any such work as this, as can easily be seen, the children use the same skill and concerted action as are involved in the daily performance of the class work. It has been found that, as interest in the result grows during the year, while personal preference still plays a large part in the choice of work and the assignment of work-fellows, there is a progressive increase in the discrimination of choice made from the side of ability. This kind of dramatic representation of events is of great assistance in the bringing to consciousness of the development of social organization in each stage; for example, the later phases of semi-pastoral and agricultural life, involving as they do the transition from a matriarchal to a patriarchal form of government, develop the fact that leadership, which was given hitherto for reasons of personal bravery or physical endowment, now naturally devolves upon the older people, who have the advantage of long experience and are the possessors through tradition of the experience of former generations.

The final stage attempted is that of the pre-Homeric period, where the chieftain or leader ruled through a council of his fellows. This furnishes many points in common with the children's own method of class government. The change from the communism of the early period, through the growth of individual rights—first in the right of personal property, then gradually extending itself from weapons and ornaments to flocks and herds, and then through the right of continued occupancy of the grazing lands with their wells and water courses—leads finally to ownership of land in the agricultural period. These ideas are, of course, accompanied with much discussion of what is done now in respect to these rights and customs, thus furnishing no slight insight into the functions of those parts of the city government with which the child has come in contact. While these connections with the city life about him are of value, yet the most powerful factor in developing a sense of responsibility along with the sense of individual rights is found in the formulation of certain communistic rights—to school material, furniture, and rooms—along with individual rights and privileges—in order and arrangement of class work, choice of seats, and other such details. As these rights must be respected, not only by the children, but by the teachers, a true democratic ideal has a chance to express itself, along with its inevitable accompaniment of individual responsibility. Possibly the only safe test of progress in the sense of responsibility is found in the difference between the way in which the group at different times in the year meets a trying situation, which in the beginning of the year would have resulted in demoralization.

It will, of course, be objected here that any ordinary child of seven or eight already possesses, by virtue of his past experience, such ideas as these of personal and community rights. But these ideas are implicit with him, just as are his ideas of time, distance, etc.; and he needs to be made conscious of them through use in new situations. It has been found that, as a general thing, children take for granted such rights as individual ownership of weapons or clothes or food, as well as the right through occupancy or discovery. It is only after much discussion that these youthful individualists could be brought to agree that without community of goods life would have been impossible in the early stages of society. One of the most important gains through the development of this sort of consciousness is the early acquiring of the sense that rights and duties are relative, not absolute. Similarly, it has been found that children take for granted combinations of families in clans and tribes. It is necessary to show the gradual development of such combinations through long discussions of what would bring about the earliest consolidations for defense or aggression. The matriarchal order of society seems to be easily taken for granted, while the rise of the patriarchal has to be developed, both in connection with the nomadic hunting of the semi-agricultural tribe and again in the organization of the pastoral people. Thus far it has not been found profitable, principally because the details of organization will in no way correspond to the natural order demanded in school work, to lay very much stress upon the forms of prevailing customs determining the government of such semi-agricultural tribes as the Iroquois nation. Indeed, the general form of a deliberative assembly, in which the right to speak is an inherent right belonging to the elders and must be earned by the young, is the only form of government at all consciously carried out, because of its similarity to the actual class order in school. Such complications as are introduced by the use of captives and slaves, while often suggested by the children, have never seemed worth worth much time and effort.

Thus far experimentation has shown that this work can most easily be carried on by the following distribution of time and method of treatment of the subject-matter: About an hour and a half a day is necessary for carrying the class through the stages summarized to the pre-Homeric period. This hour and a half will, of course, be distributed differently at different times of the year. The general average might be stated as follows: one-half hour for story and discussion of plans of work, followed by at least an hour of constructive or experimental work. This constructive work, of course, varies in its nature. It may be either illustrative of the life of the people which the children are playing, such as the making of the houses in which they lived, the clothes they wore, or the weapons they used; or it may be the carrying on by the child of some of the occupations of that people, such as the threshing of the grain, the grinding by primitive methods, or dramatic representation of their hunting, fishing, or warfare. A very little of the sensational—that is, battle, murder, and sudden death—is more than sufficient.

The occupations involving quiet thought and inventive skill furnish most of the hand-work for the children. As has been stated in the introduction, at least two lines of work involving modern equipment are carried on. Carpentry and cookery go on parallel with the constructive work involved in the primitive history of the children, while in their art and music we find the influence of the ideas they obtain from the primitive history, continually appearing, often without any conscious knowledge on the part of the special teacher. An illustration will be found in the following song, composed by the children and entirely suggested by them, the teacher not even knowing of its connection with their discussion with their class teacher, nor the latter being aware of the composition of the song:

Indians weave pretty blankets and rugs;
Esquimos live near the pole;
The Philippine houses are made all of straw;
And Cave-dwellers lived in a hole.

The Japanese make many beautiful things;
Poor Chinamen live upon rice;
The English people are fond of war;
And Americans all are nice.

For the reasons given in the introduction, much of the construction is with entirely crude material, and selection of the work to be done is made on the basis of the possibility of initiative on the part of the child. The process selected is the simplest and shortest, from the point of view of time, that can be found, and the use of modern methods, simplified and suggested by the children, is freely encouraged. The number of processes and occupations depend of course upon the experience of children and teacher. It has been found best to have the experimental and indoor constructive work involved in such occupations as pottery-making, beginning of textile work, metal-work, and the various processes connected with the preparation and storing of food carried on during the fall and winter terms. It is also a good plan to use the spring term as a time for a summary of the hunting, nomadic, pastoral, semi-agricultural, agricultural, and metal-workers' stages, through dramatic plays carried on out of doors. This involves actual out-of-door cooking, and gives a setting to the garden work and excursions to the park, etc.

The accompanying illustrations will show the way in which the children put in concrete form the physical setting for each people. Many examples could be cited to show that the main test of the success of this work—that is, the carrying over of the ideas gained into an interest and understanding of similar processes going on at the present time—has been fulfilled. One girl, while working at her first clay dishes, after discussion of the very first steps following the hollowing out of the clay ball to make a bowl, evidently going on in her own mind with the conditions now existing, asked many questions and had many ideas as to the way in which pottery-making was now conducted. After going through the school work with metals, one boy constructed an oven at home in his yard, and for more than a year, with the help of his playmates, went on experimenting in the various ways of melting lead and making molds. He also induced his father to take him to a foundry, where he saw iron cast, and is reported as having appreciated and understood what he saw in a way that seemed beyond his years. Another boy remarked, apropos of a school custom which had become a "rule": "That's the way our laws came, isn't it? And school rules are school laws."

In the first attempt to put into map-form the country in which their people were living, the children's initiative was quite limited, and each point needed much discussion and suggestion on the part of the teacher. As an illustration of the degree of independence attained through a year of such work, we might take the construction of a country on the sand table, which involved the use of all the principal facts the children had had, and the different physical settings they had worked out. There was no longer any necessity of the teacher's referring to a general slant of the land toward the sea. The course of the river, coming in through the steep part of the country where the slope is great, was made straight through a canyon, while on the lower sand plain the children, before turning on the water which was to determine the course of the river, declared that they knew the course would be such and such (indicating the winding through the flood plain), placed obstacles where they wanted the river to wind, and planned the location of their village. In locating a clay bed, which at first involved considerable experimentation, they did not hesitate to suggest that this clay might be deposited anywhere along the course where the water formed a pond or lake, or would be uncovered where the land had changed level and the new course of the stream had washed away preceding deposits from an old lake bed. In making the river bed they carefully chose water-washed pebbles. The stones which cropped out on the surface of the ground in various parts of the country must conform in nature to the general outline, the flat limestones and sandstones being placed in the river valley, while the bowlders on the mountain top were chosen from the granite or schists.

The formation of black loam had been discussed in connection with the growth of grain in their semi-agricultural village, as well as in the making of their gardens, so that in the construction of this new country in the spring the children naturally suggested placing a covering of black earth over the sand back from the seashore and up the valleys of the river, to represent the accumulations of past years of vegetable growth. They had seen many sections of soil about Chicago, and in constructing their last country they placed flat rocks to represent rock bed, and the sand on that. One of the children objected, saying that he thought there might be layers of clay coming in between, as he had seen it in the cutting near his home. The fact that clay is much more impervious to water than any other soil has been brought out in many ways, and now, when they met the difficulty of keeping the water of a mountain stream from becoming underground water, as they call it, the suggestion arose that they line with clay the course which they wished the river to follow.

In connection with the construction of the seaboard village, the question came up of the difference between the ocean and the lakes. The children who had been on the sea described the action of the tides, and said that the ocean was not only salt, but bitter. One child then said that the river in going over the land carried away salt from the rocks down to the sea. Another child, carrying on the same thought, said: "Then the water goes away, but the salt does not." We then took up the question of why the sea-water was bitter, and a child said: "There are other things besides salt in the sea; perhaps sugar." All were ready then to try to find an answer to their question, stirring up sand and black earth with water, and then straining it, as they called it, to see what the water got out of the soil. Another question which came up in this connection was, what was concerned in the distribution and formation of the black loam, aside from the action of water; and the question of growth and decay of various plant-forms involved again the part the earthworm plays in the making of soil.

While the children were much interested in the question of how the people manage to navigate the sea, the occupations of the sea-going people were not followed out, lack of background in the children's own experience being here, as always, a determining factor. Nor did it seem best to introduce more than the most primitive forms of transportation, trade, and barter.

One main result gained might be stated as the necessity of the teacher's consciousness of the *importance* of furnishing such material that the processes used spring through the child's initiative directly from the nature of that material and are conditioned by his consciousness of the end.

The result of five years' work on this problem has seemed to indicate that this subject-matter meets the following main requirements demanded in work for the children of this age: First, from the teacher's point of view, it organizes materials and sets the standard of technique within the reach of the child's capacity without in any sense impairing, because of the very contrast, his possibilities for future technical finish. It furnishes simple and definite activities, with plenty of opportunity for making the child conscious of the necessity of plans for the accomplishment of an end. Finally, and perhaps most important of all, it furnishes in a simplified form types of the principal activities with which he comes in contact with his own life. It furnishes, through its analysis of social organization, appreciation of the rationale of the organization he works out in his class, as well as of the organization of society outside of school. Lastly, there is no danger, through too persistent use of imitation; of depriving the child of the initiative and ruining his natural experimental attitude. The beginning of his acquirement of reading and writing can be easily made through his interest in the stories he or others invent, and the desire to keep a record of the work he is accomplishing, while the constructive work, as well as the geographical construction, furnishes many opportunities for the development of the arithmetical sense. If carried on with a sympathetic sense of the child's present, he can be led rightly to appreciate, through this simplification of typical life-activities, much that would otherwise be confused and sensational in his daily experience.

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